



SCHOOL BOARD OF POLK COUNTY

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September 8, 2008

To: The Federal Communications Commission

From: Dr. Gail McKinzie, Superintendent of Schools
Fred L. Murphy, Assistant Superintendent Support Services

Subject: CC Docket No. 02-06

FRED MURPHY
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The School Board of Polk County, Florida hereby wishes to support the proposed addition of "telephone broadcast messaging" to the list of services eligible for support under the schools and libraries ("E-rate") program.

Improving communications between and among educators, students, and parents can play a vital role in improving educational performance in elementary and secondary schools. Telephone broadcast messaging offers significant advantages and benefits over the less efficient means which schools traditionally used to reach out to students and parents, such as hand-delivered written notices and phone tree messages.

For example, during recent hurricanes threatening the state of Florida we were able to communicate with our school community about the necessity of closing schools. The call-down system allowed us to systematically contact our parents and employees about school closure.

Another example, telephone broadcast messaging is typically used as a means of contacting parents regarding absent or truant students, thereby facilitating increased classroom attendance. Telephone broadcast messaging can also be used to notify and inform parents of testing schedules, parent/teacher conferences, and to otherwise increase participation by parents in their children's education.

A significant benefit of telephone broadcast messaging is that it can provide an important emergency response resource in the event of weather-related events, health or other civil emergencies, or other incidents that require schools to lock down or transfer students to safe locations.

In enacting the E-rate program in 1996, Congress recognized that many schools and libraries have limited resources that constrain their access to emerging technologies that can enhance and support their educational mission. Telephone broadcast messaging, which allows schools to more efficiently and effectively communicate with students and parents, is a prime example of such an emerging technology and should be included within the E-rate program's list of eligible services.

Sincerely,

Fred L. Murphy
Assistant Superintendent
Polk District Schools